This Is What Volunteering Feels Like



YOU'RE NOT ALONE

RCN:20020057

Real stories from ALONE volunteers and older people across Ireland



At ALONE, we believe that connection is at the heart of strong, compassionate communities. Across Ireland, older people and volunteers come together every day in different ways. Our volunteers give their time through Visitation Support and Befriending, Telephone Support and Befriending, and the National Referral and Support Line. This is a vital service, delivered by dedicated volunteers and supported and guided by ALONE staff. This work clearly reduces loneliness and improves quality of life for those involved.

What begins as support often grows into friendship, with a meaningful impact for both the older person and the volunteer.

This storybook brings together voices from all corners of the country, stories from older people we support and from the volunteers who walk alongside them. They speak of companionship, understanding, and the quiet but powerful impact of simply being there for one another.

These stories remind us that when we take the time to listen, to connect, and to care, we create not only meaningful relationships but better, more inclusive communities for everyone. We are proud to share these moments with you and grateful to all who make them possible.

Thank you for being part of the ALONE story.

SEÁN MOYNIHAN
Chief Executive Officer

“Where support and connection go both ways”



ALONE supports older people in Ireland in all circumstances, you don't need to be alone to receive our services.



ALONE is a national organisation that enables older people to age at home.

Our Vision is an Ireland where older people are valued and supported to age happily at home or in the community they choose.

If you are in need of advice, support or information, please call our National Support and Referral Line, seven days a week from 8am – 8pm **0818 222 024**

If you want to volunteer with us please visit **alone.ie/volunteers**

ALONE

YOU'RE NOT ALONE

Every ALONE Volunteer Receives

Training

ALONE provides training to help volunteers feel confident, prepared and supported in their role with older people.

Feedback

ALONE values volunteer feedback and uses it to improve the programme and volunteer experience.

Recognition

ALONE recognises volunteer contributions through awards, certificates, social events and regular acknowledgements.



Support

Volunteers receive ongoing support from dedicated staff, regular check-ins and access to the Volunteer Assistance Programme.

www.alone.ie/volunteers

Help us connect with more people who can support our work by volunteering, donating, or sharing our posts on social media

“I will never stop being a volunteer with ALONE”



Countless moments of joy

When Zandile moved from Zimbabwe to Galway City, she never imagined that a simple Instagram post would change her life, and the lives of many older people, in such a meaningful way. “I started volunteering with ALONE in 2022,” she recalls. “I saw the application on social media and decided to give it a try. It’s been super nice.”

Her inspiration to volunteer came from a deeply personal place. Zandile grew up without her parents, raised by the woman she called her mother until her passing. “Before she died, she told me, ‘Wherever you go, whoever you meet, they’re your family. The more you give, the more you receive back. If you help, help with all your heart.’ I’ve carried that with me ever since.”

- **Taking the First Step**
  Like many volunteers, Zandile admits she was nervous at first. “On my first visit, I was scared, I didn’t know how to interact with an older person. But ALONE’s training really helped. We had sessions on how to sit, listen, and respond. That made all the difference.”
  It was only a one-day training, but it gave her the confidence she needed.

- **The Heart of a Visit**
  Zandile describes her visits as warm and simple: “Whenever I visit, they’re smiling. We sit, chat, maybe they offer me a cup of tea or water. Sometimes we talk about their travels, look at family photos, or even make jam together. One lady taught me exactly how she makes hers, two spoons of sugar and lots of patience!” Her relationships go beyond light conversation. Zandile fondly remembers Noel, an older man she used to visit in Galway. “He always remembered Zimbabwe. He had been there before and loved to tell me about it. He was a painter and once showed me the piece he did of a fisherman in Galway, he’d won an award for it. Losing him was very hard for me. ALONE checked on me several times afterwards and even sent a sympathy card. That showed me they care not just about the older people, but about us volunteers too.”

- **Matching, Connecting, and Caring**
  After Noel passed, Zandile was matched with a “wonderful lady, always smiling.” Building a connection was easy, they bonded over baking scones, sharing stories, and a genuine warmth towards each other. “She always remembers my name, even calling me ‘Z’ when she couldn’t pronounce it at first.”

- **The Impact of a Visit**
  “Many older people’s relatives live far away. Even one hour together makes a difference. It’s about being there, listening, and showing love.” She has also noticed how her perspective has changed. “Before, my care was focused on children. Now I care deeply for the older people too. Even just a ‘Hello, how are you?’ from an older person can brighten your day. They never pass you without greeting you, I wish more young people were like that.”

- **Advice for New Volunteers**
  Zandile encourages anyone who’s hesitant to “just try.” She explains, “Older people aren’t difficult to be with, they’ll share their memories, tell you stories from years ago. You learn so much. It’s about love, not just for yourself, but for others.”

- **Why She’ll Never Stop**
  If she had to sum up her time with ALONE in one sentence, Zandile is clear: “I will never stop being a volunteer with ALONE. No matter what.”
  To her, ALONE means companionship for anyone who finds themselves without it, whether they’re 60 or 80. “When someone is alone, they need someone to talk to. That’s what ALONE gives.”

“You learn so much. It’s about love, not just for yourself, but for others”



My Best Friend Is 102 — Age Is Just a Number

> *“Volunteering doesn’t just change someone else’s life; sometimes, it gives you a best friend you never expected”*

Caroline from Limerick has been visiting Ann, for 2 years now.

“Ann is 102 years young, and she is my best friend”, says Caroline with enthusiasm, while she continues telling us their story.

We were matched through ALONE after we had both contacted the organisation, she was looking for **companionship**, and I was keen to volunteer.

From the very beginning, there was an instant spark. Anne has a cheeky sense of humour, a sharp wit, and an attitude that tells you straight away she’s something special.

After the first visit, that feeling only grew stronger. It felt as though we’d known each other for years. Anne is still living independently, still cooking for herself, and very much still up for anything.

I call to her every week, and she always insists on making the tea. If I look even slightly tired, she’ll say, “Sit down there, Caroline, you’re worn out.”





We have fantastic banter. Anne texts me, phones me, and gives me a full fashion review every time I visit.

She loves hearing about my holidays, takes a keen interest in my family, always asks after my parents. We’ve photos together where she proudly sits in a convertible car, proof that adventure doesn’t fade with age. We often joke that we’re two wild women, and honestly, it’s true.

Our friendship is one of the highlights of my week, and it only exists because of ALONE. Volunteering doesn’t just change someone else’s life, sometimes, it gives you a best friend you never expected.

Remembering Ann.





Bringing a Bit of Sunshine

Stories of listening, learning, and making a difference

“Volunteering has done more for me than I ever expected.

It helped me put life into perspective”

Peter is one of our telephone support and befriending volunteer. He tells us his story:

I was a full-time carer for a long time. When that ended during COVID, I experienced loneliness and anxiety, it was just hard to cope. I got some help, and one of the things they suggested was volunteering. I found that ALONE was the one I’d be best suited to.

Volunteering has done more for me than I ever expected. I’m a Telephone Support and Befriending Volunteer, and I’ve also started doing visits. Just knowing you’ve brought a little sunshine into someone’s day, it feels good. You can really sense it, even over the phone.

My very first call? I was at my kitchen table, using the ALONE app. It’s simple; log in, pick a name, and call. That first call was a turning point. I realised straight away this was something good. You’re reaching out to someone who might feel there’s nothing going on in their day. That matters.

In the training I learned about boundaries, listening, and how to support older people through their challenges. My Support Coordinator is excellent, always there if I need a chat or advice.

Older people really value the little things, tea, the fire, the television, and we can learn a lot from that.

My first in-person visit was supported by my Support Coordinator, which made it easier for me and the person I was meeting.

I was alone for a long time, grieving.

Volunteering gave me purpose again.

It made me realise how much I have, and it helped me put life into perspective.



A Visit That Lasts

How a simple weekly visit can create lasting friendship and joy

Hi, I’m Karolina, mother of two, a wife and I’ve been a Visitation Support and Befriending Volunteer with ALONE for two years. I live in County Meath, and every week I visit Kim, an older woman I was matched with about six months ago.

Even though it’s still a new match, it already feels like we’ve known each other much longer. I decided to volunteer because I kept feeling that pull, you know, that urge to do something meaningful, something outside of the routine of work and home. I’ve always loved meeting people and listening to their stories, so when I found ALONE, I thought, Why not try this? When I met Kim, everything clicked instantly. We just connected. It felt natural and easy from the start.

Our visits are simple, but they mean so much. Sometimes we go to the shopping centre together, sometimes we stay at her home and chat. We talk about everything, life, the little things, funny stories, things we’ve learned the long way around.
I’ve learned a lot from Kim and I can see that she’s just as happy as I am when we spend time together. She has this beautiful way of enjoying the moment, taking life as it comes.



Spending time with her has made me slow down, breathe a little more, and appreciate the present. I didn’t realise volunteering would give me so much back. When people ask me about volunteering with ALONE, I always say the same thing: Just give it a try.

A very little time every week can change someone’s life, and honestly, it might change yours too. I always leave Kim’s house smiling, feeling lighter somehow. It’s a gift, really. One I’m grateful for every week.

“It’s a gift, really. One I’m grateful for every week”



A Friendship Full of Light:

Bridget and Marian's ALONE Journey

A New Friendship

Marian is one of our Visitation, Support and Befriending volunteers. She has been visiting Bridget for one year now. Bridget, the older person supported by ALONE, and Marian share their story.

When Fidelma, a Support Coordinator at ALONE, first spoke to Bridget about the Support & Befriending service, it was the start of a special friendship.

"Fidelma told me about having an ALONE friend visit me," Bridget says. "The next time, she brought Marian with her, and Marian has become a wonderful friend. We talk about everything and never run out of things to say. She brings light into my life on the day she visits."

Marian also remembers their first meeting clearly. "I was really looking forward to it," she says. Fidelma had contacted her, asked about her background, and the kind of person she would like to meet. She then told Marian about Bridget, who lived nearby, and they met that very afternoon.

"It was lovely," Marian says. "Bridget was bright and bubbly. I knew straight away that I was going to like her."

Their friendship quickly grew stronger.

Support When It Matters

"It's wonderful to have Marian visit me," Bridget says. "Last winter, when the weather was icy and I couldn't get out, Marian even brought me milk. The roads were bad, but she still came."

Karen, Volunteer Support Officer at ALONE, reflects on this kindness. "That's the spirit of volunteering," she says. Bridget agrees, adding that kindness goes both ways. "I've opened my home, and we've formed a real connection."

A Meaningful Connection

Marian also agrees. "Bridget is always so kind. She sends me messages at Christmas and Easter. We're friends now."

"She's lived such an interesting life," Marian adds. "I love listening to her."

Bridget sums it up simply:

"You can feel disconnected as you get older. Marian is my connection now – a deep and wonderful one."

"Marian is a light in my life the day she comes"

ALONE Volunteers help with practical support than can include:

Social Connection

through regular visits, phone calls and ongoing friendship

Community and wellbeing

by encouraging older people to take part in social activities, stay connected and maintain independence

Advocacy and service navigation

by helping older people understand information benefits and entitlements

Assistive Technology

including help using smartphones, apps, online forms and staying safe from scams



www.alone.ie/volunteers

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“Can You Help Me With This?”

Sandra and Teresa’s Story of Trust and Technology

Sandra still remembers the first day she visited Teresa. It was March 2020, the evening Ireland shut down because of Covid-19. Sitting in her car outside Teresa’s home, she listened to the announcement on the radio before stepping out to meet the older woman she would soon become very close to.

Six years later, their friendship is still going strong.

Sandra volunteers with ALONE, visiting Teresa regularly and helping her stay connected and independent in a world that increasingly depends on technology.

Over the years, Sandra has helped Teresa with many everyday online tasks. Sometimes it is renewing a European Health Insurance Card, replying to hospital appointment letters, or booking tickets for events. Other times it is helping her top up her phone, compare prices online, or avoid scam texts and suspicious pop-ups.

One moment stands out for Sandra. Teresa had previously missed out on attending an event at the RDS because tickets had sold out before she arrived. This year, Sandra and her husband booked the tickets online for her and printed them out as well as saving them on her phone.

“She was thrilled,” Sandra says. “She was so proud that she could use the barcode on her phone and scan herself in.”

Sandra has also helped Teresa install useful apps, including public transport apps that allow her to check bus and Luas times before leaving home. She has shown her how to save contacts, send photos and use her phone more confidently.

“I think technology support for older people is huge,” Sandra says. “It’s the way the world is going. Not everyone has family nearby to help.

As well as learning new skills, Teresa has become more aware of online scams and the importance of staying safe online.

“We laugh together,” Sandra says. “We’ve built up that trust over the years.”Teresa is very active, loves going out and technology can be very helpful even to get to those social events.

“Even little things can make such a big difference,” she says. “Sometimes all someone needs is a bit of help and someone they can trust.” Sandra says.

“Sometimes all someone needs is a bit of help and someone they can trust.”



Finding Connection:

My Journey as a Volunteer with ALONE

My name is Renato, and I’m 34 years old. Originally from Brazil, I’ve been living in Ireland for the past eight years, and for the last five months, I’ve had the privilege of volunteering with ALONE.
It’s a role I hold close to my heart, as it allows me to give back to a community that welcomed me with open arms when I needed a fresh start. Volunteering with older people has taught me the importance of patience. Their pace might be slower, but that’s precisely the beauty of it.

Taking the time to listen, truly listen, and engage with them at their speed is such a meaningful experience.

For me, it’s about respecting their rhythm and creating a space where they feel valued and heard. I was inspired to volunteer because I was raised by my grandparents.

Growing up, I learned to care for and support them, and those lessons stayed with me. Now, I see so many older people in Ireland who face isolation, especially during the long, dark winters.

> ***“In many ways, he’s my company as much as I am his.”***

Choosing to volunteer with ALONE felt natural, it allowed me to combine my upbringing with a chance to help older people find connection and companionship.

My time with Sean, the older gentleman I visit each week, has become a highlight of my routine. When I’m with him, the world slows down. We share tea, sometimes pizza or fish and chips, and it’s as though everything else fades away.

Those moments are not just about me supporting Sean; they’re also about him supporting me. In many ways, he’s my company as much as I am his. Our lives are so fast paced, dominated by technology, social events, and constant noise. Spending time volunteering is a transformative experience. When I visit Sean, my own problems seem to disappear, and I leave his house feeling recharged and ready to face the week ahead. If I had to sum up my experience in one sentence, I’d say it’s a short time each week where everything else in life fades into the background.

It’s the most honest, pure, and grounding time I’ve ever experienced. Spending time with Sean has been an incredible gift, one that I hope others will consider sharing as well.



Two Hearts, One Connection

How a weekly visit can light up someone's life

Finding a Way to Give Back
Hi, I'm Maxine, and I've been a Visitation Support and Befriending Volunteer with ALONE for almost four years now. I live in Cork, and every week I visit Luda, who has become one of the brightest parts of my life.

I first reached out to ALONE years ago, after losing my own mother. I found myself looking at older people walking alone and thinking, "That could be my grandmother. That could be someone I love." I wanted to give something back, a smile, a bit of company. It took a little while before a match became available, but once I met Luda, everything fell into place.

Building a Connection
Luda moved to Ireland just before the lockdown, and she has no family here. She really was alone. From the beginning, I made it my mission to make sure she never felt forgotten. In the process, I found a friend for life.

Our routine is simple but full of joy. We might go for a walk, grab coffee and cake, or visit different places I think she would enjoy. She loves telling stories from her life. She travelled widely for work, and we laugh so much. She looks very reserved on the outside, but once she starts talking she is witty, warm and full of life. I have learned so much from her, more than she probably realises.

Supporting Meaningful Moments
One of my favourite memories is the day I brought her to a Russian opera ballet in the Opera House. As the performance went on, I looked over and saw tears running down her face. For a moment I panicked. Then she whispered, "This makes me so happy."

She had not been to anything like that in years, and seeing her reconnect with a part of her past meant so much. It reminded me that sometimes the smallest gesture, an outing, a cup of tea, a shared laugh, can reach the deepest part of someone's heart.

A Difference That Goes Both Ways
I know my visits make a difference because she tells me. If she has had a tough day or a bit of pain, by the time I am leaving she is smiling again. She texts me little updates throughout the week, pictures, memories and jokes, and I love it. Knowing that I am the one person she has nearby makes me feel honoured, not burdened.

Volunteering with ALONE has changed how I look at ageing and community. There are so many older people who have families but still do not get much company because life is busy. We are all rushing around. It reminds me to slow down and appreciate the people around me, because one day any of us could be in the same position.

More Than Volunteering
When people ask if volunteering is hard, I always say the same thing. It is not a chore, it is a joy. You might start thinking you are going to help someone, but very quickly you discover it is a two way street. You gain just as much as you give, sometimes even more.

To ALONE I just want to say thank you for giving me this. I never expected that volunteering would bring a person into my life who would feel like family. But that is exactly what happened.

"I didn't just find someone to visit, I found a friend for life"



My friend, Liam Hackett, in memory.



by Paola, ALONE Volunteer.

I've noticed that the stories and wisdom of older generations are often overlooked, and it makes me sad to think they can feel invisible or undervalued in the world they helped build.

Volunteering with ALONE felt like a way to change that, even just for one person. I never imagined it would lead me to Liam. From the very first visit, we just clicked.

We had the same sense of humour, shared the same taste in music, even the same favourite song; The Great Gig in the Sky by Pink Floyd. Small things, but they mattered.

From day one, it felt like a beginning of a genuine friendship for both of us. The time we spent together was quite simple; listening to music, talking about life, sharing stories.

I once visited Liam in the Mater Hospital with a projector to watch a movie that took place in the 60s and 70s, the era he grew up in and one I love learning about.

Those were joyful memories, yet even then I felt like I was learning something important. Liam had his way of noticing things, appreciating them, and making you see the world differently. When he got sick, Liam faced it with acceptance. He wasn't ready to go, he wanted more time, but he accepted the reality in a way that taught me a lot about courage.

In fact, in the last weeks of his life, we started writing a journal together - Liam's Book of Thoughts.

He shared his reflections on life, his thoughts and advices, which I captured in writing. He hoped his daughters, Susan and Roisin, would have it someday, and they lovingly included some of his thoughts when speaking at his eulogy. That book holds some of who Liam was, I wish we had started writing sooner.

From the day I met him, the way he spoke about those closest to him with such admiration and love was incredible.

One piece of advice we wrote down in his Book of Thoughts was:

"The real secret lies in keeping your curiosity alive, continuing to learn, and not letting the fear of time stop you from enjoying life."

Coming from anyone, those words would be moving, but from someone who knew exactly how little time he had left, they carry a weight that's hard to put into words.

One day in the hospital, after being told just how little time he had left, Liam told me he wished he could see the moon one last time from the Howth pier. He never got the chance, so every time I stand there and look at the moon, I think of his wish and how easy it is for all of us to take such moments for granted.

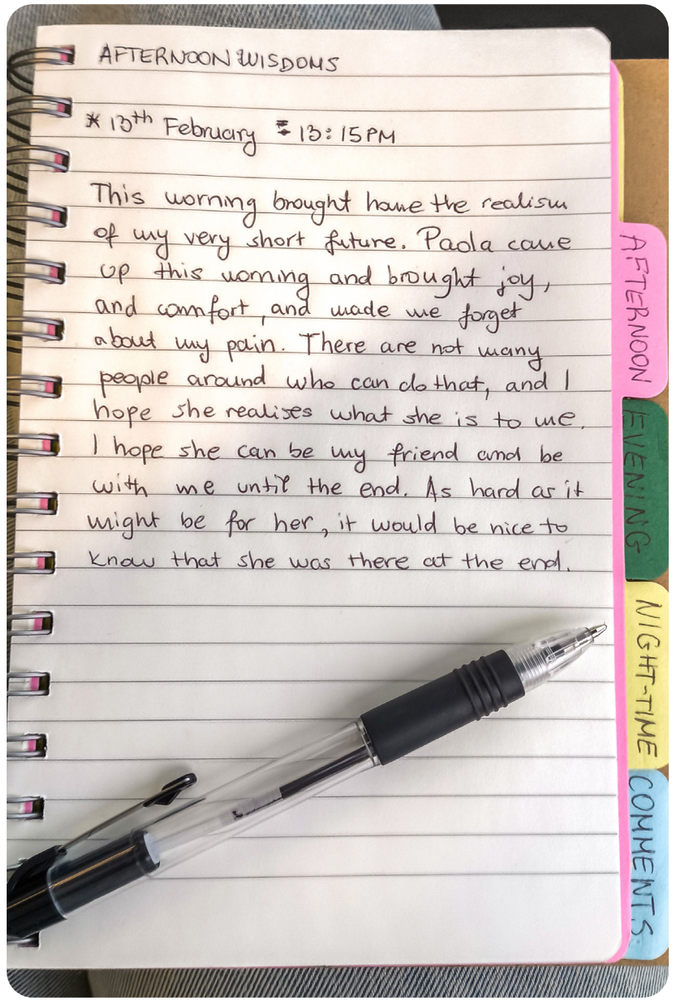


- Howth pier, photo taken by Paola Miletic

Moments like that made me realise how intentional he was about the time he had left, reminding me of how precious time really is. A few weeks before he passed, Liam asked if I could be there with him at the end. He told me, “If it’s not too hard for you, I’d like you to be there at the end.” I was honoured to be given that chance, surrounded by his beautiful family and friends.

I initially joined ALONE to help someone feel less alone, but Liam ended up teaching me that courage isn’t about not being afraid. He taught me that courage is trying to enjoy life, even when you know it’s almost over. He made me see that while death is certain, living is still a choice we get to make.

To anyone considering volunteering with ALONE, I would say this: you may think you are offering someone companionship, but you will find that they give you far more in return. While you might start volunteering to help someone, it ends up being the other way around. You’re the one who learns the most, and you realise how much they’ve taught you without even trying.





Liam and Paola wanted to share this story, and we are deeply grateful for it. Their words remind us of the power of friendship, memory, and love, and we appreciate the opportunity to honor Liam’s life in this way.

Showing Up Matters

One visit, real connection.

Choosing to Volunteer

My name is Marion, I am 53 and I live in County Clare. I volunteer with ALONE as a Visitation Support and Befriending Volunteer, and it has become one of the most meaningful parts of my week.

I first decided to volunteer because I have always believed that nobody should feel forgotten or alone, especially as they get older. Life can become very quiet for some people, and I felt that giving a little of my time could make a real difference. What I did not expect was how much it would also give back to me.

Time Spent Together

My visits are simple but special. We spend time chatting, sharing stories and enjoying each other's company. Sometimes it is just a cup of tea and a good conversation. Other times it is a laugh about the past or the little things that happen in everyday life.

Those moments of connection mean everything. You can see how much it lifts someone's spirits just to know that someone is coming to see them.

The Power of Community

Volunteering with ALONE has really changed how I think about community. It has reminded me how important it is to look out for one another and how powerful human connection can be. Even a short visit can brighten someone's day, and honestly, it always brightens mine too.

A Message for Future Volunteers

If I could say one thing to anyone thinking about volunteering, it would be this. Do not hesitate. It is not a chore, it is a privilege. You go in thinking you are there to help someone else, but you often leave feeling grateful, fulfilled and richer for the experience.

"You go in thinking you're there to help, and you leave feeling grateful"





Learning to Be Present

A story of connection, kindness, and shared humanity

My name is Leah, and I'm 38 years old. For the past nine months, I've been volunteering with ALONE, and it's been an experience that's truly enriched my life. I went into it thinking that I would give support bringing some energy, optimism, and perhaps a fresh perspective. I'm a curious person, and that's something I thought might be helpful, too. To be honest, I was initially motivated to volunteer because I wanted to give back some of the support I've received in my own life.

The idea of being hands-on and seeing the impact of my actions firsthand was really appealing. It felt like a tangible way to make a difference. Plus, I realised that I was missing having older people in my life, like grandparents, and I longed for that kind of intergenerational connection, wisdom and kindness.

What's been fascinating is that volunteering hasn't felt like a chore, it hasn't felt like it's infringing on my daily life but rather has given me a greater sense of fulfilment. Working with older people has shown me that, at the end of the day, we're all the same. We ail need support, love, friendship, and care, and these needs transcend age gaps. There's always common ground to be found - our shared humanity is what connects us. This experience has also taught me a lot about myself. I'm naturally someone who juggles a lot of things at once. However, the time I spend with Bernie, my older friend, has shown me the importance of slowing down and just being present.

When we're together, it's all I do - we talk, we listen, and that focused attention is really beneficial. It's a lesson I'm trying to take forward into other areas of my life. If I could offer advice to younger people considering volunteering ALONE, I'd say that you won't fully understand the rewards until you actually do it.

I went in thinking that I was there to help somebody, but I have realised that it's a mutual relationship; it's about supporting each other. It's been incredibly rewarding and fulfilling, and I've had a great time in the process. In a single sentence, I would summarise my experience this way: I've made a new friend that I enjoy spending time with. It's truly been that simple and that powerful.

"At the end of the day, we're all the same, we all need support, love, and friendship"









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THANK YOU

THANK YOU




AL•NE
YOU'RE NOT ALONE








AL•NE
THANK YOU


AL•NE

Help us connect with more people who can support our work by volunteering, donating, or simply sharing our posts online.

www.alone.ie/donate

www.alone.ie/volunteers



Thank you for considering being part of the ALONE community.

If you or someone you know wants to volunteer please visit: alone.ie/volunteers

YOU'RE NOT ALONE

It feels amazing to make someone feel amazing

www.alone.ie/volunteers